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ABSTRACT

A study surveyed county vocational directors in Florida to determine their equity concerns as well as their perceptions of the potential success of various program strategies. Results indicated that urban and rural districts had different equity concerns. Urban vocational directors perceived a greater degree of overall concern with all ten equity issues surveyed than did rural vocational directors. Urban vocational directors also seemed more optimistic about the success of various activities designed to achieve sex equity. Urban and rural respondents both indicated that an outside consultant or specially trained district staff member working alone would be less than completely effective as a change agent. Factors that administrators believed hindered implementation of sex equity in vocational education were attitudinal factors, curriculum materials, the way equity issues were handled, miscommunication between state level and local administrators, community attitudes toward sex equity, and student attitudes. (Five data tables and two figures are appended.) (YLB)

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Perceptions of Equity Concerns by Vocational Educators in Florida

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Perceptions of Equity Concerns by
Vocational Educators in Florida

ABSTRACT

The implementation of equity programs is a concern of many persons in education. Research on attitude and behavior change has indicated that if people are included in the planning of new programs, it is more likely that the programs will be successfully implemented. The present study was designed to determine the equity concerns of directors of vocational education, as well as the perceptions of these persons of the potential success of various program strategies. Results indicated that urban and rural districts had different equity concerns. Urban vocational directors seemed to be more aware of equity concerns and should be at the stage where planning of specific activities might be beneficial. For rural areas, an informational campaign concerning issues in sex equity should be undertaken before attempts are made at implementing equity activities.

Perceptions of Equity Concerns by Vocational Educators in Florida

Complying with sex equity guidelines is a major challenge for any school system -- from interpreting and understanding what should be done to implementing an equity plan in a local school district. Research on planning and implementing change has indicated that if people feel ownership of the proposed plan, there is a greater likelihood that implementation will be successful (Bem, 1970; Fishbein, 1967; Kanfer & Goldstein, 1975; Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1969). An important starting point in any equity plan is identifying the specific needs of the school system. If key personnel do not perceive a need for equity planning, then any equity program imposed upon that district is unlikely to succeed.

Identifying and overcoming barriers and identifying and training change agents are important components in the planning of an equity program. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to survey county vocational directors in the State of Florida to ascertain their perceptions of the relative concerns present in achieving sex equity, their perceptions of the relative concerns present in achieving sex equity, their perceptions of the potential success of various techniques for increasing equity, and their perceptions of an effective change agent.

Instrumentation

A modified Delphi technique was used in developing the instrument.

A random sample of 12% of the county vocational directors were identified and interviewed by telephone. These individuals were asked to identify barriers to equity and to make suggestions for ways of overcoming the identified barriers. They were also asked what type of change agent (outside consultant versus a specially trained in-district staff member) would be least acceptable. After these responses, they were asked to react to a short list of barriers (identified in a survey of equity programs; Thomas, 1980), and to a list of activities which had been found useful in other parts of the country. The final form of the questionnaire incorporated the ideas of the county vocational directors, as well as the results of a review of several national programs.

Sample

The questionnaire was mailed to each county vocational education director in the State of Florida in early April, 1980. A follow-up letter and a second copy of the questionnaire was sent to non-respondents two weeks later. Fifty-six of the 67 directors responded, for a response rate of 84%.

Survey results in other states have indicated that responses to similar surveys varied according to geographic location (urban-rural). Therefore, results are presented here for the group as a whole as well as for the urban-rural breakout. The definition of urban-rural was based on the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area listing. Although the entire population of interest received

a questionnaire, inferential statistics have been computed. In such a small sample, a small "turnover", especially among the urban group, could produce relatively large changes. Thus, in an attempt to communicate the sensitivity of the results, we have made the assumption that the Florida vocational directors represent a random sample of directors and have thus used inferential statistics.

Results

First, ten concerns relating to equity were listed. Each concern was to be ranked on the basis of perceived importance. Results are given in Figure 1 in terms of percent of responses for the urban and rural groups, as well as the total group. In addition, z tests for independent proportions were computed for the urban-rural comparison to the responses to "very important". Results are summarized in Table 1.

Second, survey respondents were asked to indicate how successful they felt a given activity would be in their county. Twelve activities were presented. Each activity was ranked on a three-point scale of perceived success (very successful, somewhat successful, not at all successful). Results are shown in Figure 2 in terms of percent of responses for the urban and rural groups as well as the total group. Again, z tests for independent proportions were computed for the urban-rural comparison for the "very successful" responses. Results are summarized in Table 2.

Third, the fourteen activities suggested by national sex equity specialists were listed. Each respondent was asked to check any activity s/he felt would be helpful in promoting sex equity in vocational education. Results are presented in Table 3. Again, the results are presented for the urban and rural groups separately as well as for the group as a whole.

Fourth, the vocational directors were asked to identify the type of change agent they felt would be least well received in their county. Change agents included outside consultants, interested local staff members, and a combination of these two. Results are presented in Table 4.

Fifth, an open-ended question was asked of each respondent: "What do you believe is the one single most important factor which hinders the implementation of sex equity in vocational education?" The majority of directors indicated the most important factor to be attitudes. A summary of the responses is given in Table 5.

Discussion

There were some urban-rural differences in perceptions of the relative importance of various equity concerns. For example, urban directors generally rated all concerns listed as more important than did rural vocational directors. Four differences reached statistical significance ($p < .05$), as indicated in Table 1. These items dealt mainly with materials, resources, and specific types of technical assistance perceived

as needed by the urban directors.

Other concerns of high consensus for urban directors were the availability of nonsexist career counseling information (85%), attitudes of counselors (100%) and teachers (100%) and staff training in equity (85%). For rural directors only two concerns received more than two-thirds "votes" as very important: attitudes of counselors (79%) and teachers (81%). (See figure 1)

It thus appears that, based on the results of the present survey, urban vocational directors perceived a greater degree of overall concern with equity issues than did rural vocational directors. However, there are several factors which may explain these observed differences. First, it has been observed that persons in rural areas generally hold more conservative attitudes and beliefs. Secondly, vocational directors in urban areas may be more aware of equity issues because of the size of school system, and the types of information that might be shared. For example, staff in larger school systems may have ready access to equity programs partially because of location. The Southeast Sex Desegregation Assistance Center in Miami may well have a high level of visibility in the surrounding urban counties.

As indicated in Figure 2, urban vocational directors seemed more optimistic about the success of various activities designed to achieve sex equity. For example, more than one-half of the urban vocational directors perceived that the following activities

would be very successful in their districts: 1) emphasizing nonsexist career counseling, 2) holding in-service workshops on sex equity, and 3) developing a career awareness program which empahsized diverse career options for females and males. The results of the z tests for independent proportions indicated that only one difference was significant: that of holding in-service workshops dealing with sex equity. Again, the urban directors perceived this option as being more successful than did the rural directors.

None of the activities received a response of "very successful" by half or more of the rural vocational directors. However, all activities were perceived as being somewhat successful by at least half of the respondents. It is interesting to note that the urban vocational directors perceived the various equity concerns as being of greater importance than did the rural directors, and that, in addition, they were more optimistic about the potential success of various activities designed to increase equity within vocational education.

Table 3 presents the responses relating to desired activities relating to sex equity. These activities are ones that might be potential techniques of increasing sex equity, depending upon the level of interest of potential participants. There were fewer urban-rural differences in responses to this question than to the first

two questions. More than half the respondents, both rural and urban, would like to see the following activities implemented: goals and objectives to achieve sex equity, and technical assistance for implementation of sex equity programs. More than half of the urban directors would also like a publicity campaign relating to Title VII and Title IX, and training of local staff members to lead sex equity workshops.

Identifying unacceptable techniques of implementing equity programs is also important. Respondents were asked to indicate which type of change agent would be least desirable for their districts. Here, urban and rural responses were quite similar. Approximately one-third of the respondents believed that either an outside consultant or a specially trained district staff member working alone would be less than completely effective. However, only one-fifth believed a combination of the two would not work well.

Respondents were asked to list the single most important factor which they believed hinders the implementation of sex equity in vocational education. Since some respondents listed more than one factor, the total number of responses exceeds the total number of respondents. Attitudinal factors were considered by both urban and rural vocational directors to be important barriers. Other factors mentioned included curriculum materials, the way

equity issues are handled, the miscommunication between state level and local administrators.

Community attitudes toward sex equity were identified by 25% of the respondents as a barrier to sex equity. Student attitudes were also identified as a significant barrier. Thus, it would seem that public awareness campaigns might be an effective means of providing information about both the need for equity, as well as what equity might mean on a more personal basis.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the present study, it appears that strategies for the implementation of educational equity will be differentially effective for urban and rural school districts in Florida. Specifically, urban vocational directors seem to be more aware of equity concerns and should be at the stage where planning of specific activities might be beneficial. For the rural areas, an informational campaign concerning issues in sex equity should be undertaken before attempts are made at implementing specific equity activities so that awareness of equity issues in these areas will be more similar to that in urban areas.

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Table 1

Relative Importance of Concerns to Vocational Educators in Achieving Sex Equity

	Urban		Rural		
	%	N	%	N	z
Availability of nonsexist career counseling information	85	11	58	25	1.778
Instructional materials that are free of sex bias	69	9	33	14	2.315*
Attitudes of counselors and other personnel toward career options of males and females	100	13	79	34	1.812
Attitudes of teachers toward career options for males and females	100	13	81	35	1.732
Attitudes of students toward career options for males and females	77	10	65	28	.813
Barriers that may keep students from entering nontraditional vocational programs	62	8	49	21	.823
Assisting students in obtaining employment in nontraditional fields	77	10	40	17	2.342*
Local resources available to assist with sex equity concerns	62	8	30	13	2.090*
Staff training in how to overcome sex role stereotyping	85	11	37	16	3.135*
An equity model with which to compare staff progress	30	4	35	15	1.129

* $p < .05$, Two Tailed

Table 2

Perceived Successfulness of Activities
Designed to Achieve Sex Equity

	Urban		Rural		
	%	N	%	N	z
Emphasizing nonsexist career counseling	54	7	33	14	1.3716
Reviewing the current curriculum to determine whether it is free of sex bias	23	3	26	11	- .2191
Adding specially designed nonsexist materials to the curriculum	23	3	23	10	0
Developing a career awareness program which emphasizes diverse career options for males and females	69	9	39	17	1.9035
Holding in-service training workshops on sex equity	54	7	21	9	2.29978 *
Conducting conferences or seminars on sex equity	31	4	12	5	1.6389
Reviewing current curriculum materials for potential sex bias	23	3	12	5	1.0073
Conducting a local needs assessment relating to sex equity	38	5	21	9	1.2418
Using a consultant to provide equity resources and info.	23	3	16	7	.5761
Receiving help identifying and establishing networks and linkages to other sources of info.	31	4	18	8	1.0093
Developing a nonsexist student recruitment program	38	5	26	11	.8451
Providing displays and bulletin boards with sex equity materials	38	5	23	10	1.0684

* p .05, two tailed

Table 3

Desirable Equity Activities

Activity	Urban Total	Urban %age	Rural Total	Rural %age	Total Group Total	Total Group %age
a. A clearinghouse with sex equity information	4	31%	16	37%	20	36%
b. A statewide newsletter addressing sex equity information	5	38%	10	23%	15	27%
c. A series of workshops to disseminate sex equity information	6	46%	16	37%	22	39%
d. Support for the development of nonsexist materials	6	46%	13	30%	19	34%
e. Support for research efforts in sex equity	1	8%	4	9%	5	9%
f. A state policy statement on sex equity	6	46%	15	35%	21	38%
g. Goals and objectives to achieve sex equity	7	54%	24	56%	31	55%
h. A timetable for the implementation of sex equity goals and objectives	3	23%	5	12%	8	14%
i. Publicity campaign relating to Title VII and Title IX	7	54%	10	23%	17	30%
j. A lending library of resource materials relating to sex equity for each county	3	23%	18	42%	21	38%
k. Training of local staff members to lead sex equity workshops	8	62%	15	35%	23	41%
l. A state review committee to examine curriculum materials for sex bias	2	15%	12	28%	14	25%
m. A system of pay incentives for incoporating non-sexist materials and programs	3	23%	6	14%	9	16%
n. Technical assistance for implementation of sex equity	8	62%	28	65%	36	64%

Table 4

Change Agents/Change Agent Combinations
Perceived as Least Acceptable

Identified Change Agents	Urban		Rural		Total Group	
	Total	% Age	Total	% Age	Total	% Age
a. Bringing in an outside consultant to work with the staff	4	31	14	33	18	32
b. Identifying the interested staff members within the district to work on equity issues	4	31	14	33	18	32
c. A combination of outside consultant and local staff members working together on equity	3	23	8	19	11	20

Table 5

Factors which hinder the implementation of sex equity in vocational education

General Factors	Specific Issues	Urban		Rural		Total Group	
		Total	% Age	Total	% Age	Total	% Age
Attitudes	students	0	0%	11	26%	11	20%
	parents	3	23%	3	7%	6	11%
	staff/teachers	2	15%	7	16%	9	16%
	employers	0	0%	5	12%	5	9%
	counselors	4	31%	5	12%	9	16%
	community	2	15%	12	28%	14	25%
Materials	Curriculum/ materials	1	8%	0	0%	1	2%
Communication	the way equity issues are handled	0	0%	2	5%	2	4%
	miscommunication between state level and local administrators	2	15%	1	2%	3	5%

FIGURE 1
The Relative Importance of Concerns of Vocational Educators in Achieving Sex Equity

FIGURE 2

Perceived Successfulness of Activities
Designed to Achieve Sex Equity